

Visual methods for militant research: counter-evidencing and counter-mapping in anti-border movements

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Abstract

This article examines two methods for the production of visual material within migrant solidarity movements. These two methods, which involve evidencing and mapping, are explained in reference to the theory of “counter-information” (Cleaver 1995) and as examples of militant research in anti-border movements. An examination of militant research provides an ethical orientation, as well as a theory for explaining the creation and distribution of knowledge through movements, which is used to analyse the suitability of both approaches. With a focus on expanding methods associated with militant enquiry, this article argues that counter-evidencing and counter-mapping are practices for the production of visual material that are increasingly relevant for engaged research within radical social movements.

Keywords: militant research, counter-evidencing, counter-mapping, migration, borders, visual methods

Introduction

On 24 March 2016 hundreds of people left the informal refugee camp at Idomeni, marching towards Greece’s border with North Macedonia. They walked for a few miles before reaching the Suva Reka River dividing the two countries. Despite its fast-flowing and freezing cold water, the people made a “human chain” to help each other to the far bank and into North Macedonia. However, police awaited them on the other side and most of those who made it were pushed back into Greece. The night before, three people from Afghanistan died trying to cross the river at the same point. Desperate to flee the terrible conditions for migrants in Greece and to continue their journeys to other European countries, the rewards of crossing the river outweighed its potential risks.

One reason why people crossed the river at this specific point that was reported in the news was because of a leaflet circulating in the Idomeni camp. This leaflet included a map showing where the border fence ended and the river could be crossed with directions to get there from the camp. ‘Activists’ and ‘unknown people, perhaps groups that call themselves volunteers’ in solidarity with those on the move were accused of producing and sharing the informational map by both authorities and NGOs, and ultimately for the previous night’s deaths

(Salem 2016). However, while the map did provide a useful indicator as to where it would be easier to cross the border, and printing it out on paper made the information easier for people to share with one another, it merely provided a visualisation of knowledge that already was known and circulating among the migrants in other ways.

Ten months prior, and on the other side of the European continent, the group Calais Migrant Solidarity published a video of police violence against migrants trying to cross from France to the UK. The video depicted police assaulting and tear gassing people as they were being removed from UK bound lorries close to Calais's ferry port. Such violence was and remains routine; however, as this video went viral, the French police found themselves under increased public scrutiny and forced to briefly pause their programme of systematic violence against migrants. The video was just one example of visual material created by the group to document police violence in Calais, and resulted in a court case against the officers filmed.

These two examples reflect some different uses of visual material within anti-border and migrant solidarity movements. They each operated in a different way and were formally different—one was a black and white map printed on paper and circulated by hand, while the other was a digital colour video uploaded and shared on the internet—however, the motivations behind their production was the same. Both artefacts were created and circulated in order to challenge state mobility restrictions and aid struggles for free movement.

Since these events, now more than five years ago, there has been an explosion in the production of visual material recording the violence facing illegalised travellers in Europe. People on the move, investigative journalists, professional researchers and NGOs, autonomous groups and individuals in solidarity with migrants, and even state actors¹ have become increasingly active in monitoring border violence and demanding accountability for perpetrators. There has been a sort of 'documentary turn' emerging from the combination of digital communications technology and social media, which allows testimony from migrant survivors to spread quickly, and the proliferation of verification techniques by desk researchers using open source data and remote sensing to add evidential weight. Not just artefacts recording the brutal routine operation of the contemporary EU border regime for posterity's sake, this visual material and, the groups that create it, lie at the very heart of border abolition and migrant advocacy efforts today.

In this article we examine two methods for the production of visual material in the context of migrant solidarity movements. We investigate what we call counter-evidencing and counter-mapping to understand how documenting the

¹ One example is the Turkish Coast Guard's archive of recorded push-backs from Greek territorial waters. Although an example of the production of visual material which apparently condemns border violence, we recognise that the Turkish state does not publish this information with liberatory motivations but instead seeks to control the framing of migrant pushbacks, whilst continuing to cooperate with the EU in border externalisation and deportation.

violence of the border and creating maps which help people to circumvent them can contribute to a no borders politics. Both methods are conceptualised through what Harry Cleaver (1995), in his examination of the autonomous networked documentation and reporting on the struggle of the Zapatistas, has described as ‘counter-information’; information that opposes the narratives contained in government press releases and spread by commercial mass media outlets. We analyse these methods through the framework of militant research as an ethical orientation and practical program for performing investigative work by/with/for social movements to better understand themselves and their context of struggle. Our argument is that, as struggles adapt themselves to the increasingly important role that visual media plays in political contestations, the production and analysis of visual material is itself a method for militant research. Whilst focusing on cartographic and evidential practices within migrant solidarity movements, our aim is to explain how militant research can be developed to include visual methods more broadly.

The first section of this paper describes militant research as a form of knowledge production located within social movements. The history of the concept in the Italian *Autonomia* intellectual tradition is presented, alongside a discussion of the ethics of performing militant research in and with social movements. The second and third sections discuss counter-evidencing and counter-mapping in the context of migration struggles as contemporary examples of militant research, which differ from the (auto)ethnographic methods it is typically associated with. Counter-evidencing offers a formulation of the production of grassroots collaborative documentary material which can then be used as an effective tool for advocacy. Counter-evidencing has its roots in documentary photography and the visual arts but has since developed beyond forms of investigative journalism. However, in examining it as a method for militant research it is possible to eschew some of the criticism associated with journalistic approaches and identify these practices at the centre of what movements do today. Counter-mapping is a method for producing cartographies that work against traditional state-based representations of territory, borders, and human mobility that lie at the heart of migration control regimes. A number of diverse examples of migration counter-maps are discussed in order to show how this practice can work to counter mobility restrictions and the depoliticisation of migrants across geographic, affective, and representative scales. In describing these two specific forms of visual production within the terms of militant research in/on migration struggles, we wish to offer inspiration for solidarity activists and researchers seeking methods of collaborative engagement that can contribute tangible, if contingent, artefacts and benefits to the struggle for free movement.

Militant research

Militant research is foremost a partisan undertaking aimed at developing intellectual tools for social movements to wield in their struggles rather than an

academic protocol to discover and elaborate some form of ‘objective truth’. It takes political struggle as the starting point for developing knowledge while recognizing struggle as a form of understanding in and of itself. It is prefigurative knowledge production emerging within social struggles, where activist and academic work—doing and thinking—are not tasks divided from one another, but become complementary moments of revolutionary praxis (Herrera, 2018). Rather than privileging the ‘expertise’ of the theorist, it focuses on ‘the ways in which militant praxis and organizing are themselves modes of understanding, of interpreting the world, and expressing modes of social being’ (Shukaitis et al, 2007, 31). Two moves comprise militant research. One is directed inwards to facilitate the ‘capacity for struggles to read themselves’ by exploring their tensions and problematics (Colectivo Situaciones, 2003). The second is directed outward; amplifying struggles’ knowledges, disseminating their critiques and reflections, and implementing social and political alternatives. Through a critical praxis of movement, alongside deep investigation of how formalised struggles work, fail, and even reproduce structural oppressions, knowledge is gained that contributes to struggle while forcing taken for granted understandings of how to do politics to be rethought.

Militant research has a specific history and developed in a particular social context as an approach to the study of anti-capitalist social movements. Its roots can be traced to radical scholarly endeavours within the Autonomia tradition (Garelli and Tazzioli 2013), and in Italy during the 1970s militant research inspired critical investigations into the struggle against capitalism, the state, and patriarchy. As an approach to research, militant investigation may have originated in the Italian Autonomia movement but it has been developed in a variety of other moments of crisis and conflict.

As participants and scholars our experience with militant research comes from our involvement with anti-border struggles, mainly in Europe, over the last ten years. Because of this, our understanding of how to apply and expand militant enquiry relies on several examples developed in conversation with this movement. However, our exploration of alternative methods within a militant enquiry framework is not limited by anti-border movements, it is merely the example that we are most familiar with and have chosen to expand upon here. Our examination of methods for militant inquiry develops the production of visual material in both an evidential and cartographic form, which have a role in a variety of different movements and contexts.

Ethical orientation

Militant research as methodology responds to the ways in which academic research so often reproduces the very extractive labour relations and structural oppressions opposed by grassroots social justice movements. Despite the best intentions of researchers, the restrictions placed on their engagements ‘in the field’ by institutions, as well as the political economy of publishing research outputs, often means that social movement research brings more benefits for

the researchers than participants while leaving the former less exposed to the dangers and challenges of the research context. Even if unable to completely avoid this tendency, militant research tackles such inequality head-on by asking the question ‘of how to make this particular kind of work useful for militant goals’ (Grappi 2013, 320) over the career ambitions of the researcher and beyond the parameters of a research grant.

For Nick Clare (2017), who writes about these ethical concerns as he experienced them during his field work in Argentina, reproducing structural oppression is a dilemma that forms the basis for a militant approach to research. By advocating for a militant research which ‘studies up’ rather than focusing on itself, Clare (2017, 378) describes a method for militant enquiry that is developed within or through a political movement, but with the explicit desire of producing information useful for that movement. The focus for militant enquiry must be on that which the movement is in opposition to in all senses. For researchers with certain institutional credibility, funding, and other privileges, mobilising resources and skills against elites, policy makers, and structures of power can create ‘tangibly beneficial research for movements, uncovering information they may be unable to access’ (Clare 2017, 378). By doing so, it is possible to take steps to avoid perpetuating and reproducing structural privilege and power against those whose struggles one is in solidarity with.

What qualifies a militant research practice is as much an ethical orientation, in terms of the application of time and resources by the researcher, as it is about the type of knowledge produced. For critical border studies scholar Maurice Stierl (2019), what militant enquiry offers is the opportunity to challenge the division between theory and method. Instead of a narrow ‘set of principles’, which guide research in the field, for Stierl (2019, 17) militant research as method can become ‘the enactment of critical theory by a relational, situated, and subjective being’ with the creation and production of understanding then conceived of as an ‘everyday activity’, not the preserve of the outside observer. These ethical questions and critiques form the foundation of our assessment of different methods for militant enquiry.

Developing different techniques for militant research means recognising how movements are themselves distinct arenas for knowledge production, which contain their own practices for the sharing and analysis of information. At the centre of militant research there is an explicit act of translation between the movement and other epistemic fora or settings. Transmission between these fora often begins with a focus on the academy but can include, among others, the media, the criminal justice system, and the public sphere. The various fora that contemporary movements engage with demand an extended grasp of how to operate within these arenas of knowledge production from the militant researcher. Between these different settings there are often overlaps, where the transferal of knowledge is relatively fluid, but there are also ‘epistemic gaps’ (Montesinos Coleman 2015) which reflect the different requirements applied to these distinct fields of knowledge production. This means certain information or

practices appear differently when they are removed from their original context and placed into another. As with all processes of translation, the validity and accuracy of any rendition is open to criticism and delegitimisation. For example, the sharing of information between the academy and within movements are two distinct forms of knowledge production, with their own requirements and demands. For militant enquiry to be successful it requires constant translation between these different contexts. In order for militant research to succeed it has to bridge these gaps and translate, backwards and forwards, between the movement and other arenas.

Within these processes of transferral there are several moments of possible disruption. There is the gap between production and presentation, as well as expectations and reception. Assessing where these gaps appear and how they manifest along lines of privilege is a necessary part of militant research. For example, what type of position would 'doing research' require to relate to those with whom one wants to be in solidarity with/research? Even if celebrating and describing the potency of resistance, would such research not contribute to undermining it at some level by rendering it knowable to power? In the context of anti-border movements, can those white-male EU nationals ever understand, much less articulate and represent, the movement or political subjectivity that motivates and performs the very real everyday politics of resistance to borders? In attempting to, would this not just fail and end up reincorporating them into another false understanding? These questions form part of an ethical orientation for thinking through expanded methods for militant research, in particular those involving the production of visual material in connection to anti-border struggles. Beyond these questions, there are also serious concerns about whether or not dissident knowledge production which unsettles, perhaps even undoes, the epistemological foundations of regimes of control is even possible, especially when it involves abstracting information and objects of analysis from their original context.

In order to better diagnose these questions and criticisms, it is helpful to expand upon how these issues manifest themselves in one specific context, i.e. the study of anti-border movements and migrant solidarity struggles. In this regard militant research has often been contrasted to the approach of migration studies. As Nicholas De Genova (2013, 252) argues, the move to differentiate a specifically *militant* enquiry is somewhat pointless because there is actually 'no neutral vantage point' from which to produce knowledge about borders and migration. By producing knowledge on the causes and practices of migration, it is rendered 'knowable' to state power and, in so doing, is complicit with its governance. In other words, all knowledge produced about migration and borders must be understood as emerging from a field of struggle in which we all have a position, whether or not we have actively chosen it.

De Genova (2002, 437) criticises militant research into borders and migration as promoting a somewhat 'journalistic' approach to knowledge. However, for Glenda Garelli and Martina Tazzioli (2013, 247) militant research into migration needs 'first of all to scrutinise and counteract the paradigm of an all-

encompassing governance of mobility and to unpack the fantasies this paradigm entails and engenders'. They also claim that through critiquing the 'knowledge-based governance of migration' developed in the academy and state research institutions it is possible to undermine the forms of mobility control which rest upon them. They place a focus on militant research's ability to counter the knowledge frameworks by which migration is made sense of, but also consider the epistemic consequences that develop from a host of methods which address more empirical questions. Through our examination of the production of evidential and cartographic material, we argue that these methods retain the ethical orientation of militant research whilst providing innovative ways to support struggle, counter specific frameworks of knowledge, and communicate movements' political critique and perspective in various fora. Furthermore, as specifically visual artefacts, they are more accessible and interpretable for broad sections of the public while perhaps being less valuable outputs for academic institutions that still over-privilege text.

Methods for militant research

As an approach to examining radical politics, militant research requires the researcher to engage with practices of knowledge production from within grassroots movements. The main method adopted by militant researchers is a form of radical (auto)ethnography. For Natasha King (2016, 9), who developed an 'activist ethnography' within anti-border movements in Athens and Calais, this involved participating in struggle and semi-structured interviews with co-participants. Anarchist and anthropologist David Graeber (2004) has argued that ethnographic methods provide an ideal basis for militant enquiry. Through participation with groups and networks that form part of anti-authoritarian movements, Graeber (2004) argues that ethnography offers the perfect toolbox for the production of non-vanguardist research into radical politics. One of the ways that ethnography assists militant enquiry is by deliberately blurring the distinction between research and political action, breaking down the barriers between types of knowledge production, in order for the 'researcher' to generate insights through and with movements (Apoifis 2016, 50).

Another method for militant enquiry adapted from ethnography is participant observation. This method positions the researcher within the everyday activities of a group in order to gain 'a deep understanding of a particular topic or situation through the meanings ascribed to it by the individuals who live and experience it' (McKechnie 2008, 598). Through shifting their position of enquiry, the militant researcher moves from being an '*observing participant*' to becoming a '*participating observer*' (Gordon 2012, 87, emphasis in original). Here, again, is a point at which the breakdown of the distinction between research and political action becomes central to militant research. In examining the production of visual material, both evidential and cartographic, as a method for militant research, our goal is not to supplant ethnographic methods, but to

instead show how, as movements are diverse arenas for the production of knowledge, methods for militant research can and should reflect this diversity.

Within the breadth of knowledge produced and motivated by a militant research agenda there are myriad outcomes and approaches. Militant research projects have engaged with various movements, such as the alter-globalisation movement (Fernandez 2008; Gordon 2007; Graeber 2009), anti-austerity protest movements (Apoifis 2016; Colectivo Situaciones 2011; Halvorsen 2015) and anti-border movements and migrant solidarity struggles (English, 2017; Mitropolous 2007; Starodub 2019). There are militant anthropologists who dedicate decades organising with a single community (Scheper-Hughes, 1995). Then there are militant research projects that provide analysis, but do not seem to engage directly with the everyday activities of a movement (Holmes, 2005). There have also been many militant investigations that investigate the relationship of different types of media to movements (Jeppesen et al 2017; Juris 2007; Pickerill 2007). However, few of these actually include visual material as the object of analysis.²

In this examination, the methods we wish to examine involve the production of explicitly visual material, either evidential, cartographic or both. In order to tie these methods into the literature on militant research, it is useful to examine mapping and evidencing as processes for the creation of ‘counter-information’ (Cleaver 1995) that works against the state’s depiction of events, which so often poisons public opinion against social movements and legitimises their repression. We expand on these methods through the study of mobility and migration, with each approach holding the potential to challenge dominant narratives and undermine certain epistemic hegemonies (Vukov 2012; Vukov and Sheller 2013). However, we also recognise that these methods have their roots in state techniques for oppression and control; a key point. Both mapping and evidencing are tools of the modern state and criminal justice system. . Mapping is a tool of state formation and colonialism, as well as a fundamental element of border control, as the conquering of territory and its later division into bounded states relies on cartography. The formal constraints of evidential material were defined by the police—as a modern institution—through the application and development of techniques of image capture. The production of evidence or maps with liberatory aims has to contend with these histories, situating itself within and against them. As such, outlining what constitutes the ‘counter’ move is vital for the critical deployment of our two chosen visual methods of militant enquiry as a part of social movements.

Counter-evidencing in migration struggles

As a method for militant research, counter-evidencing describes the grassroots collaborative practices used within social movements to document moments of violence and injustice. The main component of these evidential practices is the

² Although there are some exceptions; for example Bookchin et al. 2013.

co-production of visual material as a tool for advocacy in courtrooms, as well online by contributing to social and news media. Similar to practices of cop-watching, which ‘challenge the authority of police and traditional media’ by borrowing from and disrupting ‘traditional journalistic practices while giving voice to counter narratives’, collectivity is a necessary part of the process (Bock 2016, 15). What separates these evidential practices from journalistic or photo-documentary practice is a reliance on the strengths of collectivity. Groups, made up of various individuals, as well as networks of different collectives, collaborate to film, edit and publish evidential material. Collectivity provides a degree of anonymity for individuals involved, which is one way of protecting participants from reprisals from the police, whilst also preventing any one contributor from claiming ownership over the visual material that has been produced. Practices of counter-evidencing are built on collectivity in order to challenge extraction and co-option, whilst also defending against the state and countering the dominant framing of violence.

Rather than beginning within the fields of anthropology or sociology, which have already been discussed as the most common sources of methods for militant research, counter-evidencing is most clearly theorised in the fields of documentary photography and the visual arts (Forensic Architecture et al 2014; Linfield 2010; Lowe 2014; Malaquais 2017; Sanyal 2017). Yet, counter-evidencing is not just about creating visual material in and of itself, but about producing evidential artefacts intended to operate in specific fora in order to document violence and call for perpetrators to be held accountable. By encouraging the production of visual material, in order to challenge the legitimacy of structures and acts of violence, the practice of counter-evidencing allows movements to document or communicate about what they are struggling against. In the case of anti-border struggles, counter-evidence is often produced to document acts of violence by state actors. These actors enjoy a degree of immunity or a lack of oversight and there is a contest over how freedom of movement struggles and the violence of state actors against people on the move is represented and framed. Videos and other visual material that show the brutality of border regimes are used simultaneously to document the injury and death caused by contemporary forms of migration control, while also presenting the struggle for recognition, redress, and an end to the injustice of border violence.

As has already been mentioned, anti-border movements provide the context for our examination of the use of visual methods for militant research. A specific example of counter-evidencing in migration struggles is Forensic Oceanography’s (2018) *The Seizure of the Iuventa*. The evidence produced by Forensic Oceanography documents how the rescue ship Iuventa did not collude with people smugglers and was used in a court case to counter state evidence that attempted to criminalise the Iuventa crew. Another example is the secret footage of illegal push-backs on the Croatian-Bosnian border published by the Border Violence Monitoring Network (2018), which was widely circulated online as evidence of the mistreatment of migrants by the police on the border

between the two Balkan countries. Though these two projects are formally very different it is their function as evidence that we wish to examine. By combining critical theorisations of documentary techniques, with a perspective on their use as part of the campaigning and organising that happens within movements, we will provide an analysis of them as examples of counter-evidencing in migrant solidarity movements.

Formulating the techniques used in grassroots collaborative documentary practices as methods for militant research requires a critical diagnosis of what it means to produce visual artefacts as evidence. Counter-evidencing involves the production of visual artefacts that have a specific evidential function, which often means conforming to certain parameters for the representation of violence. These framings are connected to and produced by the state, which is also the subject for many practices of counter-evidencing. For Eyal Weizman (2017, 64) who is the Director of Forensic Architecture, which provided institutional support for Forensic Oceanography's investigation *The Seizure of the Iuventa*, counter-evidencing involves the adoption of a 'forensic gaze'. The forensic gaze is primarily associated with the state and originates with institutions of control, in particular the police, who pioneered the production of images as evidence (Tagg 1988, 2009). What a formulation of counter-evidencing provides is a reversal of the forensic gaze, whereby the production of evidential material is focused upon documenting acts of violence by states. In the case of *The Seizure of the Iuventa*, Forensic Oceanography presented a timeline of events, supported by sourced visual material, which provided clear evidence that countered the prosecution's narrative of cooperation with people smugglers. For theorist Thomas Keenan (2014, 67-68), who has collaborated extensively with Weizman, this describes a 'forensic sensibility' that involves a 'persistent commitment to evidence, testimony, and the document—and to the necessity of making arguments, in courts and elsewhere.' Collaborative documentary practices, like Forensic Oceanography, resist acts of state violence and repression by producing visual material that conforms to the formal constraints placed upon evidence by a court, but they do it in a way that is designed to subvert and challenge a specific framing of criminality and violence.

Unlike other methods for militant research, the foundation for counter-evidencing as an approach originates within literature associated with the examination of documentary photography. Photographer and scholar Allan Sekula (2014), in reference to the collaborative work of documentary photographer Susan Meiselas (1997) and forensic anthropologist Clyde Snow, describes this co-production of evidential material as a form of 'counter-forensics'. A focus on the forensic quality of a documentary project presents an existential challenge to the highly individualised discipline of documentary photography. A discipline that has often failed to mobilise the wealth of visual material it creates in order to challenge the regimes of violence and the injustices it records, preferring aesthetic speculation over political engagement (Sekula 1986). For visual artist and theorist Martha Rosler (2004, 185-186) the documentary image has always presented two constituents; as an instrument of

evidence and testimony in a legal sense, which argues ‘for or against a social practice and its ideological-theoretical supports’, whilst also acting as a historic document that is characterised by aesthetic pleasure and judged on qualities of ‘well-formedness’. The deployment of documentary techniques in the creation of evidence attempts to dissolve these two constituents and involves the production of visual material that speaks in both a historic or aesthetic sense as well as a legal manner. For Antigoni Memou (2013), the relevance of documentary photography for social movements can be examined as ‘counter-information’ (Cleaver, 1995), which is a concept defined through the visual media produced within the Italian Autonomia movement as a response to government and commercial media reportage. What we seek to do is strengthen this connection to the history of militant enquiry by expanding upon the production of cartographic and evidential material within current social movements. Expanding upon these methods as tools for militant research requires the jettisoning of conceptions of individual artistic intervention in favour of collaborative endeavour. Techniques of counter-evidencing are not limited to the documentary photographer or individual artist but can and should be recognised as a component of the visual culture produced collectively within social movements.

Just as the outcomes of militant research must present themselves as knowledge, in order to act as evidence, the image must conform to the expectations of what constitutes ‘the evidential’. Militant research fosters the growth of existing relationships, in movements, providing the opportunity to transfer time, resources, skills and information between institutions. In this way information is translated for different constituents. The production of counter-forensics involves a similar process of transferal, where information and artefacts are collected in the field, taken to a laboratory / studio or collated by a mediator, and then published in a forum (Keenan & Weizman 2012; Weizman 2014, 2017). On its most fundamental level the field is the site where raw information is gathered and the forum is the site where the results of the evidencing process are presented and contested (Weizman 2014, 9). For militant research the encounter is an act of translation of knowledge between two different constituents. In counter-evidencing the production of documentary material must speak to and is constrained by the fora it wishes to operate within. As an approach to militant research, counter-evidencing provides a method for visually documenting violence and injustice, particularly when considered in relation to migrant solidarity and border struggles.

As well as collaboration, what distinguishes counter-evidencing from other documentary practices is the explicit use of visual material for the purposes of advocacy instead of purely aesthetic reasons. Forensic Oceanography’s (2018) investigation, *The Seizure of the Iuventa*, gathered video footage from journalists, the rescue team aboard the Iuventa, as well as log books from the ship, and a transcript of communication with the Italian Coastguard. From this material, Forensic Oceanography was able to reconstruct how the rescue operation took place. Through this process it was possible to provide a narrative

that contradicted the accusation that the crew of *Iuventa* were colluding with people smugglers. In submission as part of the case for the defence in the Italian Supreme Court, Forensic Oceanography provided evidence that countered the framing of events provided by the prosecution. A constituent element of Forensic Oceanography's approach involved collaboration with activist networks like Watch the Med - AlarmPhone, which provides a helpline and monitors refugees and other migrants who find themselves in distress whilst crossing the Mediterranean, as well as other NGOs and media platforms. Collaboration with other collectives and networks demonstrates how practices of counter-evidencing form part of wider campaigns and movements. By deploying techniques from the visual arts, but moving beyond the spaces of presentations associated with the art world, *The Seizure of the Iuventa* case demonstrates how counter-evidencing is developed within broader movements and translated for diverse fora.

As a method for the collection and publication of documentary material, the practices used within movements can be analysed as forms of counter-evidencing. Another example of this is the work of the Border Violence Monitoring Network (2018), and specifically the video footage they obtained of push-backs on the Croatian-Bosnian border. By producing representations of violence against refugees and other migrants, the Border Violence Monitoring Network attempts to undermine mobility restrictions and borders by framing them as sites of violence and illegality on the part of the security services. By creating evidence, which documents forms of border violence, groups like the Border Violence Monitoring Network effectively challenge and undermine the legitimacy of the border. Documenting violent push-backs, taking written testimonies, and compiling this material into legal dossiers has become a part of the repertoire of migrant solidarity groups. Through this practice the legal forum has been a primary context into which evidence is circulated, while other fora that feed back into the movement also play a role. As the anti-border and migrant solidarity movement has developed, in response to increasingly violent border regimes, the circulation and collation of evidential material has often been a priority for challenging the way that movement restrictions are represented in the public imagination.

Providing material support to people crossing borders without permission often includes, directly or indirectly, the recording, collating, documenting, and evidencing of violence as part of the reframing of borders and movement restrictions. Border-zones, by definition, constitute a peripheral space but they also present the common characteristics of a field for counter-forensic investigation, as sites where poverty is often rife and the myth of national belonging is used to justify violence and mobilise hatred (Weizman 2014, 10). The mediator in this case is the Border Violence Monitoring Network, a group involved in the transferal of artefacts from the field to certain fora. Different groups or networks pose as interlocutors of visual evidence, taking raw content from the field, preparing it and publishing it. There is no outside authority that legitimises the visual material they produce or their validity as a mediator of

evidence. These mediators are sometimes formed of collaborative alliances, which can include NGOs, activist groups, journalists, and most importantly migrants themselves.

Creating evidential material for a growing movement, like the one that emerged during the European refugee ‘crisis’, means producing visual material that can be shared and circulated widely, and often relies on social media. As Weizman (2014, 12) has diagnosed, these approaches are a response to ‘the development and widespread accessibility of digital data’, as digital technology has expanded so has the ‘the capacity to bear witness’. As the number of images and publicly available information has increased, the process of producing evidence from this ‘image complex’ comprises a series of techniques for ‘interpreting, verifying, decoding and amplifying’ (Weizman 2014, 12). Organising and contributing to struggle then includes filming, editing, and publishing short documentary videos, with the co-production of visual evidential material an increasingly important part of social movements. If counter-evidencing was ever a method limited to documentary photography it has now out-grown this initial definition. Presently it seems to resemble a mode of engaged investigative journalism. However, even though practices of evidencing incorporate journalistic and photo documentary techniques, the fundamental basis for each approach is different. Not only is counter-evidencing wedded to collectivity, through form and motivation, these practices diverge from news media reportage by focusing on their efficacy as tools for advocacy. In this way the production and circulation of evidential material, documenting violence, is a grassroots and horizontal process that requires the participation of different individuals and groups in order to prepare and distribute evidence into several different fora.

Representations—images, photographs, videos, testimonies, reports, and articles—can all be critically studied as evidence. To explain how the production and analysis of this evidential material is a method for militant research, it is necessary to examine how certain depictions challenge the way in which violence is framed. Challenging the framing of the border involves contesting the presence or absence of different forms of violence, which forms a central part of evidencing as a method for anti-border movements. By delimiting what can be seen, the frame draws a boundary around what is determined as evidence. Framing is an operant function of the image, and is in turn a part of what produces visual representations as evidence of violence. The frame is a function of the camera and a component part of the creation of any photographic image (Azoulay 2008; Butler 2010). Any framing is itself situated within time and space, within a field of vision (Butler 2010, 80). Any image also has a relation to the conditions and the surroundings in which it was produced. The ‘fora’ in which images are imbued with an evidential quality vary and they all contain their own ‘political reality’ (Weizman 2017). Examining the process of framing is a key part of understanding how representation and the production of evidence operate. Framing is not just about what is included or excluded but also who is designated as the party responsible for carrying out

forms of violence (Butler 2010). As part of the evidential function of the image, photographs and video footage attest to one certainty; the conditions for the creation of an image (Sekula 1986). An ethical appreciation of the relationship between the people in front of and behind the camera is a constituent part of explaining how evidence is produced within social movements, and how it can be used as a method for militant research.

Counter-evidencing provides the tools for thinking through the analysis of collaborative documentary practices within movements. In conversation with theories used to describe the practices of socially and politically motivated documentary photography, counter-evidencing repurposes these tools and positions them within social movements. Politically committed documentary practice is no longer the reserve of an elite few but is a fundamental part of social movements that seek to evidence injustices and challenge forms of state violence. However, counter-evidencing has its limitations. It must conform to the standards for representation laid out by the fora it wishes to operate within. It can also be undermined by prejudices about its creators within those fora, revealing how the perceived authority carried by counter-evidence can be determined by the political positioning of its creators vis-a-vis the forum of presentation rather than its objective validity. Yet counter-evidencing has potential as a method for movements and militant enquiry, contributing to the struggle against borders by providing a clear set of practices that can be applied to document and represent state violence for all to see.

Counter-mapping in migration struggles

Activist mapping of the EU border regime serve as organizing nodes rather than just navigational tools... [t]hese maps are often part of a *militant* or *activist research* embedded within social movements with the goal of deepening and advancing struggles and creating new subjectivities, as opposed to generating knowledge within a classical academic framework. (Casas-Cortes and Cobarrubias 2008, 64)

As the opening quotation describes, another visual method for militant research in migrant solidarity movements is counter-mapping. This concept can be understood as the use of mapping techniques (a number of which will be presented shortly) to produce counter-information useful for people's autonomous movements, often against state control. Like other methods for militant research, there is a strong ethical orientation in counter-mapping and the collaborative nature of production is key. Decisions of what and with whom to map are important to consider when beginning a counter-mapping project. In counter-mapping every attempt must be made to produce maps useful to movements, but which do not aid the state in its understandings or repression of them. This requires adopting what Pezzani and Heller (2013, 296) call a

‘disobedient gaze’ which ‘simultaneously refuses to disclose clandestine migration and reveals the violence of the border regime’.

However, the counter-mapping process, which is fundamentally about making visible sensitive information, is always fraught with danger. The term ‘counter’ must be used with caution as it may too readily imply that our maps work as we intend and do not facilitate state violence (L. Lambert 2018, 10). The decision to map, especially in the context of irregular migration, should never be taken lightly. A counter-map of border security infrastructure, if discovered by police, can end up aiding them in anticipating and capturing migrants circumventing controls, not to mention criminalise the people who made/possessed the map. However, here we argue that, both tactically and strategically, counter-maps can be useful artefacts to create as they provide an effective visual device through which movement actors can quickly understand, communicate and respond to their position within a given field of struggle.

In this section we describe two methods of counter-mapping within the context of migrant struggles; 1) the use of predominantly state cartographic logic and technology against migration controls and 2) the personal mappings of migrants journeys. There have already been a number of excellent reviews of migration counter-mapping practices in their wide diversity which this article draws from including Bacon et al. 2016, Casas-Cortés et al. 2017, Tazzioli 2019 and van Houtum and Bueno Lacy 2019. We expand on this literature to provide a clear argument for the proficiency of counter-mapping as a tool for militant research, both within migrant solidarity movements and beyond.

The basic function of a map is to fix a particular representation of space to allow for interventions upon it to be more easily conceived. Historically this function has mostly been applied to projects of exploitation and domination. Cartography as a way of ‘seeing like a state’ (Scott, 1998) facilitates governmental interventions by abstracting space from historical, social, and environmental processes. The lines maps then inscribe upon this abstraction are able to be realised through (the threat of) force (Wood, 2010). In just one example, colonial projects used mapping to ‘inscribe the territories Europeans wanted to settle with an emptiness upon which they could overlay their geographical imagination’, imaginings then realised through violence and dispossession (Mitchell 2012, 59).

However, Edward Said (1995, 27) states that geography, whilst an art of war, ‘can also be the art of resistance if there is a counter-map and a counter-strategy’. Though cartography and state power are undeniably linked, it is possible to take advantage of the authority of maps to counter political domination if one controls their means of production (Crampton and Krygier, 2006). Cartographers who try to avoid the inherent structural problems in map-making, while advancing social struggle, can make maps which ‘undermine dominant paradigms [and] have counter-hegemonic potential’ (Craib 2017, 54). Just as in the practice of counter-evidencing, counter-maps of migration

produced as ‘a vehicle of resistance’ (Matless, 1990) appropriate the very tools to police mobility against state systems of mobility control.

An example of such a counter-map which may be practically useful to people on the move is a detailed map of border-zones, and the security infrastructures deployed in them, which must be avoided during unauthorised journeys (as in the case of the mass crossing of the Greece/ Northern Macedonian border mentioned at the beginning of this article). Such maps are actually produced all the time by those who are crossing irregularly as they collect and share information, sometimes with the use of technologies like smart phones with GPS and mapping applications and sometimes without. However, these existing practices can be augmented by other militant researchers who apply cartographic methods and other research tools to yield more extensive maps of border-zones.

One, now-historic, example is the ‘bordergeography’ of the French town of Sangatte, very close to the border with Britain, created by An Architektur (2002), and discussed at length by William Walters, (2008). Produced almost ten years ago, the maps created as part of this project of course need to be updated, however they did effectively model Calais’ ‘transit spaces’ like the Eurotunnel terminal and ferry port that have been securitised against illegalised migration with architectural and cartographic techniques. This offered people the potential to study such spaces before and after irregular crossing attempts to better understand their composition. Another example in this vein is hackitectura’s *Cartografía Crítica del Estrecho (Cartography of the Straits of Gibraltar)* (2004) which shows the Spanish-Moroccan border area and a number of the border security devices deployed there.

Such maps, and others yet to be made, could be augmented and updated to more accurately display today’s border security infrastructures, perhaps using open-source investigative methods and satellite imagery. Researchers might also be able to take advantage of their citizenship status, racialisation or institutional affiliations to collect and make publicly available information on the composition of border-zones which others without such privileges cannot so easily glean without risking capture by (border) police. An inspirational and artistic approach here is Heath Bunting’s *BorderXing Guide* (2002). In this work Bunting makes attempts at crossing several European borders, while documenting his journeys as well as the obstacles he encounters. Of course the situations in which he was attempting his crossings are incomparable to the daily realities illegalised migrants face, but his archiving and dissemination of useful, if basic, information is an example of the kind of engaged practice that counter-mapping as a method for militant research can build upon.

While these efforts attempt to map the security infrastructure used to police and capture unauthorised mobility, others have been made which visually depict the injury and death at militarised borders in order to denounce the state actors responsible. These counter-maps employ the same ‘cartographic gaze’ (Specht and Feigenbaum, 2018), disembodied and surveillant, along with the remote

sensing technologies and Geographic Information Systems (GIS) used by states, but repurposed towards resistant ends, to hold them accountable for the violence they inflict at their borders (Dodge and Perkins, 2007). This approach is, in fact, a kind of synthesis of counter-evidencing and counter-mapping where testimonies and other data are displayed across time and space; making it easier to reconstruct complex events to show how they unfolded as well as allow patterns in the data to emerge more readily.

Examples of this type of counter-map in a migration solidarity context include the ‘Watch the Med’ map, which displays the boundary lines of territorial waters and search-and-rescue zones of various countries in the Mediterranean Sea alongside locations where migrant deaths at sea have been recorded (Casas-Cortes et al. 2017; Heller and Pezzani 2017). Nicolas Lambert and Maël Galisson’s ‘*A Calais la frontière tue!*’ (2017) also maps the deaths of people in the region of Calais who were trying to cross to the UK, or otherwise had irregular status. In the borderlands between the US and Mexico there are ongoing efforts to map the deaths of irregular migrants in the Sonoran desert to understand the human cost of the US’ deterrence strategy (Stewart et al 2016). There is also the ‘Push Back Map’ (n.d.) that records, displays, and denounces the illegal push-backs of irregular migrants occurring worldwide, while the ‘AlarmPhone’s Aegean Archive’ (n.d.) similarly maps push-backs and other abuses by the Greek authorities at their land and sea borders with Turkey. Finally, the ‘*Degagemap.info*’ platform by Calais Migrant Solidarity and Human Rights Observers (n.d.) interactively maps evictions and destructions of migrants’ homes at the UK’s externalised border in Northern France, and operates both as a form of ‘cartographic critique’ (Mapping Safe Passages 2019) and as a way of ‘keeping a memory archive of refugees’ spaces that have been evicted, or “disappeared” (Tazzioli and Garelli 2019, 407). As violence, injury, and death at borders so often go unrecorded by states who either deny it outright or outsource it to foreign actors, security infrastructure, or environmental hazards, these projects visibilise and seek accountability for both acts of state violence, and their ‘violent inactions’ (Davies et al. 2017), responsible for killing migrants in border-zones.

Apart from these examples of cartographic counter-information, another way migration counter-maps disturb governmental maps of migration is by pointing them out as reductive and politicised abstractions. Migrants’ journeys are typically much more complex, non-linear, interrupted, dangerous, socially embedded and emotional than the governmental maps of mobility flows imply (Mainwaring and Brigden 2016, 247). Therefore, many counter-maps try to more accurately represent the embodied experiences of those moving irregularly on their discontinuous journeys; the push-backs, the periods of waiting and feelings of limbo between moments of crossing. These maps ‘fill-in the blank space’ on governmental migration maps through narrating people’s experiences of their journey and it’s hold-ups, and often result in more artistic vernacular cartographies than technical ones. In doing so, they disturb conventional maps by re-centring migrants as the primary agents of their journeys along creative

and unpredictable routes, and as containing individual autonomous motivations other than the ‘push and pull factors’ they are so often claimed to respond to.

One example of this is Amalia Campos-Delgado’s (2018) representations of irregular migrant journeys transiting the US-Mexico border through counter-mapping. Campos-Delgado gets migrants to draw their journeys complete with the violence they experienced, their discontinuous crossings, and the environments they travelled through, producing a deeply personal alternative cartography of border crossing. In doing so, these maps counter the invisibility of their authors’ experiences within dehumanised meta-narratives of the regime of migration governance, whilst punching holes in the perceived impermeability of nation-state borders as depicted on political maps through the retelling of stories of successful unauthorised border crossings.

In the European context some of the maps presented in Migreurop’s new *Atlas des migrants en Europe* (2017) demonstrate a similar approach. One of these, ‘*La frontière Franco-italienne: cristallization des violences et violations des droits*’, represents the border of the Roya River valley between the French-Italian border not as a straight line between two territories, but a detailed drawing of the very terrain which such a line cuts across. Apart from geographical points of interest (e.g. rivers, mountain peaks, roads, and valleys) and the police and military checkpoints which migrants must circumvent, subjective experiences and emotions have also been written onto the border landscape. Arrows do not just begin in Italy and end in France, but go off in every direction, sometimes even looping back on themselves. They end up in locations labeled ‘fatigue’, ‘involuntary return to Italy’, ‘lost’, ‘cold’, ‘path of no return’, ‘police violence’, ‘deportation’, ‘rocky ledges’, and ‘danger’. This map thus displays not only the information relevant to those crossing in terms of police control points and geographic obstacles so that they might be appropriately planned ahead for, but also depicts the subjective experience of the upcoming journey. It highlights the specific dangers for illegalised border-crossers in the region, mapping not just the terrain they must traverse and the border regime which sits upon it, but also the affective obstacles that must be overcome.

Other examples of this type of migration counter-mapping are ‘*Le Parcours de Mustafa*’, also from Migreurop’s *Atlas*, and the “Drawing our own Map of Routes” workshops held in Centro Social Pantera Rosa (Casas-Cortes et al 2017, 15-19). These cartographic practices are a way for those who experience border violence and mobility restrictions to insert themselves into the terrain they have traversed, re-centring migrants’ experiences of passage within the visual representation of borders. This type of ‘deep mapping’ (van Houtum and Bueno Lacy, 2019) privileges the affective space of movement in which physical geography is just one of many contributing factors. Spatial control mechanisms in border-spaces aim to not only physically disrupt unauthorised journeys, but have the added goal of demoralising and dissuading people from attempting them in the first place. Therefore, maps which provide a picture of the affective

geographies migrants need to navigate on their journeys can equally contribute to orienting their paths of escape.

Before concluding the paper we'd like to finish by noting that the power of counter-mapping can extend beyond the tactical. Returning to the quotation that opens this section, we'd like to highlight that the act of counter-mapping itself, as a method for militant research and knowledge production, can additionally create new political subjectivities and instigate political change (Counter Cartographies Collective et al 2012, 461). By creating tools to understand and illustrate a shared position of 'where we stand' in relation to broader, perhaps obscured, structures of power, collective subjectivities form and shift that in turn allow for different political expressions. Counter-mapping as part of social movements re-orientates subjectivities away from prescribed positions and social roles, additionally facilitating political change.

Conclusion

We've suggested ways militant researchers can participate in freedom of movement struggles through the production of different types of visual counter-information. We argue that images that communicate the gratuitous violence, as well as specific functioning of oppressions, are effective tools for denouncing and charting paths of escape from violence, as well as objects worthy of analysis. Counter-evidencing and counter-mapping are differentiated from typical (auto)ethnographic militant research practices of scholar / activists, in particular those involved in migration struggles. What these methods aim to create are useful resources for movements to understand the geographic and political terrain on which they struggle while powerfully communicating grievances to the public, and in other fora. We have stressed the importance of militant research practices to not just begin in movements and continuously work with them throughout the stages of production to make sure research outcomes are relevant and useful, but to not fixate on movements. Rather, attention should be placed on the structures of power which movements oppose to reveal their logic, function, and consequences. Critical reflexivity nevertheless remains crucial; not just in terms of the positionality of the researcher in relation to movement actors and their terrain of struggle, but on the processes of translation necessarily a part of understanding and representing life and death at militarised borders.

Yet, we would like to end by re-emphasising caution in producing visual materials, even when the counter move is central to their production. Producing evidence of border violence is no doubt important for the public to see the suffering caused in their name, especially when one of the hallmarks of this violence is that it is deniable: externalised to foreign actors, security infrastructure, or environmental hazards; disbelieved due undocumented migrants' inability to access institutional complaint procedures; or unrecorded as migrants' digital devices are often taken, broken, or provoke further violence by police. Unfortunately, given the preponderance of sensationalised and

emotive images today, it is increasingly difficult for people to ethically reflect upon that which they cannot see. In this context, ‘making visible’ can still be an important, even necessary, task for solidarity activists.

However, discussed in the counter-evidencing section, images of border violence, especially those resulting in injuries and death, are always framed in a particular way through broader discourses of migrant illegality. It is difficult to, through images alone, not end up reproducing migrants as either criminal or victim; depoliticised subjects, alternatively threatening or at the mercy of the state. Therefore, practices of counter-evidencing and counter-mapping need to be combined so that we are not only producing denunciatory visual materials, but integrating them into re-conceptualizations of irregular migration and borders. More than an ocean of images of border horrors we need tools to navigate them; to see if, when, and how borders can be subverted or circumvented, and to take action against them. Learning how to pay attention to the very real human cost of state border security policy and its physical manifestation, but also chart how they work across physical and mental planes can allow for more strategic decisions about when using visual materials will work for or against social movements. Counter-mapping and counter-evidencing, if done correctly, can together reframe, not only understandings and imaginings of borders in many different fora (even those stacked against autonomous movements), but the ways in which they can be resisted. However, the ‘counter’ must never be taken for granted, but must always be a site of reflexive and translatory labour by militant researchers in conversation with their movements and audiences.

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